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ABSTRACT

Studies of delinquency have recently shifted their emphasis from social structures that motivate delinquent acts to those that define an act as delinquent. This shift suggests that preventing behavior from being labeled delinquent could prevent the occurrence of additional or more serious delinquency. A study of Chicago communities demonstrated that communities respond differently to such behavior. In communities with the lowest rates of official delinquency, results indicated that residents used numerous alternatives to the police in response to pre-delinquent behavior, while residents of communities with high rates of official delinquency tended to call the police. These differences suggest that a community's ability to provide alternatives to the justice system may reduce the official delinquency rate as well as the number of children who proceed from pre-delinquent to delinquent behavior. (Author/JA)

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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

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In the past twenty years the studies of the etiology and prevention of delinquency have shifted their emphasis from social structures that impart motivation and afford opportunity for delinquent acts to those that define an act as delinquent. This shift brought new meaning to delinquency prevention by suggesting that preventing behavior from being labelled delinquent could prevent the occurrence of additional, and perhaps more serious, delinquency. Unfortunately, the limits of the delinquent definition and the application of that definition to specific behaviors and persons are assumed to be functions of bureaucratic policy, professional ideology and racism, and community is accorded no role in the labelling process or in the prevention of labelling. Similarly, students of community and delinquency have neglected labelling and continued to focus almost exclusively on the role of community in imparting motivation and opportunity.

This paper argues that communities can prevent delinquent behavior by restricting the definition of delinquency and, thereby, preventing the labelling of community youth. To neglect the role of community in the labelling process is to overlook an important means by which communities prevent excessive labelling and further delinquent behavior.

The first of the following sections describes the role of community in the labelling process and presents data from three community areas in Chicago to support our argument. The second section begins to explore reasons why some communities are better able to buffer their children than others. Finally, the paper suggests further research necessary to confirm and specify the role of the community in preventing delinquent labelling.

The Role of Community in Delinquency Prevention

Labelling theorists neglect community largely because they perceive it as powerless relative to bureaucratic self interest, professional ideology and racial prejudice. Research on police decision making has shown, however, that social control bureaucracies such as the police are limited in their ability to define delinquency by the fact that they are largely reactive organizations. The overwhelming majority of police activity--including work with juveniles--is initiated by citizen complaint (Reiss 1970; Wilson 1968; Black 1980). Moreover, citizen complainants have a great deal of influence over what the police will do once they arrive on the scene. In a study of police handling of juveniles, Black and Reiss (1970) found that black complainants demanded that police take action against juveniles more often than white complainants and suggested that differential arrest rates were a reflection of this difference rather than race prejudice on the part of the police. Consequently, it is clearly simplistic and even misleading to say that social control bureaucracies are entirely responsible for differential labelling of juveniles as delinquents. Citizens, by virtue of their willingness to activate the police in response to specific behaviors, exert tremendous influence over the labelling process.

As part of the National Evaluation of the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders Program (DSO), we examined the responses of residents in three Chicago community areas to juvenile misbehavior and especially status offenses. These data show rather dramatically that citizen demands for police intervention in the case of juvenile misbehavior differed substantially among community areas and that these differences

contributed to different levels of delinquent labelling in the communities.

The communities were chosen to provide variation on the demographic and social characteristics of residents and included a predominantly black and lower class community--Southeast, a black middle class community--South Central, and a predominantly white working class community--Southwest. In a series of studies we collected data on these communities including: 1) police calls for service involving juveniles; 2) citizen preferences as to reactions to juvenile misbehavior, especially status offenses; and 3) interorganizational arrangements for providing service to status offenders and other youth.

The information on police juvenile activity was obtained from a sample of all police contacts with juveniles from the pertinent communities. All contacts occurring in two three month periods were chosen and those involving children not living in the communities were later dropped from the sample. For each call for service we collected data on the nature of the offense, the offender, the complainant, and the police decisions made.

Citizens' preferences were obtained from telephone interviews with a random sample of adult citizens in the three communities. In each community the sample was chosen through a process of random digit dialing. Respondents were asked if they resided in the sample communities and those who responded negatively were not interviewed. Approximately 300 respondents in each community were identified and interviewed in this fashion.

The data on youth serving organizations was obtained from interviews with 197 administrators and staff members in 135

organizations serving children in the three communities. The organizations were identified by a three stage process in which informants were asked to identify agencies that served youth and dealt with youth problems in the area. Social service directories were used to identify additional agencies located in or serving the communities. Finally, a snowball sampling method was used in which respondents were asked to nominate organizations involved in youth service. A cumulative tally of nominations was kept and any organization receiving two or more nominations was included in the sample.

The survey of community residents asked respondents to indicate to whom they would turn if their child ran away from home. The question was designed to elicit mention of the organizations or persons in each community who were perceived as the appropriate source of aid in the event of minor juvenile misbehavior. Although this refers to only one specific type of misbehavior, the questions can provide a useful indication of the extent to which the justice system is viewed as the agent of first rather than last resort in responding to juvenile misbehavior.

The customary response to runaway behavior differed considerably across communities with 52.8 percent of residents in the lower class black community mentioning the police, 42.4 in the middle class black community, and 35.4 percent in the working class white community. The middle class black community made more extensive use of social service agencies as opposed to the police, and the working class white community sought help from churches, schools, extended family and community organizations rather than the police (Lynch, 1981).

TABLE 1:

Community by Use of Alternatives to the Justice System

Use of Alternatives to Justice System			
Community	Justice System	Alternatives	Total
Southeast	52.8 (132)	47.2 (118)	100.0 (250)
South Central	42.4 (95)	57.6 (129)	100.0 (224)
Southwest	35.4 (84)	64.6 (153)	100.0(237)

x2 = 15.13 P. = .001

gamma = .237 d.f. = 2

It is difficult to say how much these different institutional arrangements affected the labelling of juveniles as delinquent and, thereby, the incidence of additional delinquency. One partial approach to assessing their importance is to assume that the amount of officially labelled misbehavior is a function of the probability that misbehavior is reported to the police and the actual number or rate of misbehavior. We can adjust official rates of misbehavior for differential use of the police as a response by using the data from the citizen survey as an indication of the probability of reporting status offense behavior to the police. The 'true' rate of juvenile misbehavior--the rate when differences in the buffering ability of communities are controlled--can be obtained by dividing the official rate of status offense behavior by the probability of reporting such events to the police. If alternative institutional arrangements for responding to juvenile misbehavior are

worthy of consideration, then the misbehavior rates adjusted for the probability of using the police should be more nearly similar across communities. The officially reported and the adjusted rates are presented in Table 2.

Clearly, when we adjust for the differential use of police in response to juvenile misbehavior, the differences among communities in terms of status offense behavior do not disappear. Southeast--the lower class black community--still has a much higher rate of status offense behavior than the middle class black community and the white working class community. Adjusting for a community's ability to buffer its children, however, does substantially reduce differences among communities. Using the officially reported data, the status offense rate for the South Central community is two thirds that of Southeast and the Southwest community's rate is approximately one third of the Southeast rate. Using the adjusted figures, the South Central rate is 82 percent of the Southeast rate while the Southwest rate is 51 percent of that for Southeast. While the ordinal ranking of these three community areas remains the same before and after the adjustment, the magnitude of the differences between the areas changes substantially. With a larger sample of community areas we may see even more substantial departures even from the ordinal ranking of community areas obtained from official statistics.

Our point here is not to show the frailty of police statistics, but to demonstrate the importance of community institutional arrangements in buffering children from delinquent labelling by formal agents of social control. In communities with institutionalized alternatives for handling juvenile misbehavior, only one third of those engaged in such

TABLE 2:

Official Peported Rates for Status Offenses
and Rates Adjusted for Police Reporting by Community Area

	Rates			
Community Area	Official	Adjusted[1]	% of Southeast Rate-Official	% of Southeast Rate-Adjusted
Southeast	.047	.089	1.00	1.00
South Central	.031	.073	.66	.82
Southwest	.016	.045	.34	.51

[1] This adjusted was computed according to the following procedure:

Officially reported status offenses rate = total status offenses × probability that status offenses will be reported to the police

$$\frac{\text{Officially reported rate in each community}}{\text{Probability that status offenses will be reported to the police}} = \text{total status offenses in community}$$

Probabilities of reporting status offenses to the police in each community are:
Southeast: .528 South Central: .424 Southwest: .345

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behavior are labelled officially, while in those without these alternatives over half such children are labelled. This difference is substantial and worthy of further investigation.

More importantly, this difference in labelling is not due to differences in police policy, but to differences in the reporting behavior of community residents that determine whether or not the police will become involved. These differences at the community level have been undervalued and understudied because of labelling theory's over-emphasis on the power of social control organizations. More research must be directed toward finding out more about the range of institutionalized alternatives to the police at the community level and why these institutions appear in some communities and not in others. Only with such knowledge can we begin to prevent the excessive labelling of juvenile misbehavior without the negative unintended consequences that characterize system and organizationally based efforts at diversion (Spergel, Reamer, and Lynch, 1981).

Understanding the Role of Community in Delinquency Prevention

These observed differences in responding to juvenile misbehavior on a community basis can contribute to efforts at delinquency prevention only if we can begin to understand why these differences occur and take steps to encourage more buffering at the community level. Specifically, it is important to distinguish the relative importance of community composition from that of community organization. Community composition refers to those aspects of community that are simply aggregated characteristics of individual residents which are or border upon the ascribed, such as race, education or income. Community organization refers to those aspects of community that are shared characteristics of

community residents (such as shared beliefs or interactions) that are a function of shared residence. This distinction is crucial for guiding reform because community composition is determined to a large extent by more macro social forces, e.g., income distribution, housing market and therefore less malleable than community organization characteristics which, although influenced by compositional factors, are not determined by them. It is possible, for instance, to have a racially mixed community that is highly integrated, i.e., has dense overlapping patterns of interaction, due to the presence of a universal employer as was the case in Kornblum's Blue Collar Community (1974). Community organization offers the possibility for mediating structural differences such as class or race, while community composition simply situates these larger differences in a restricted geographical area. If the observed differences among communities in the use of alternatives is simply a function of community composition per se then the potential of community as a means of limiting labelling is minimal.

Chief among the compositional explanations of alternatives use are those that emphasize differences in the socioeconomic composition of communities. People with more education and income have sufficient resources and sophistication to seek out and pay for, if necessary, a wider range of alternatives to the police. In an earlier paper, we have shown that differences in income do not influence the decision to call the police once the effects of education are controlled for, but education leads to more extensive use of alternatives even when income is held constant (Lynch, 1981). Consequently, this analysis will focus on the effects of the educational attainment of community residents on their use of alternatives to the police. Educational attainment is

related to sophistication in the matching of problems with solutions such that more educated persons will make finer distinctions among problem types and identify a wider range of potential remedies. A community composed of more highly educated residents, therefore, will have a generally higher level of alternatives use.

The community organization explanation has two components -- a value component and an interaction component. The value component refers to the shared beliefs of residents, which are negotiated in the course of day to day existence. Neighbors forge a general code of acceptable behavior through the accumulation of specific incidents where etiquette is breached and sanctions applied (Janowitz and Suttles, 1978). In an effort to minimize conflict there is a gradual convergence to a minimally acceptable standard of appropriate behavior and a set of appropriate responses to any departure from that standard. One component of this general standard refers to appropriate response to juvenile misbehavior and these shared beliefs at the community level will influence the extent to which alternatives to the police are used. The more tolerant or permissive the standards in a community, the less the reliance on the police.

Community organization also refers to the extent and type of interaction among community residents groups and organizations. The relative prevalence of interaction among community residents will influence the extent to which fellow residents are known and trusted. When disputes arise in communities with high levels of interaction the disputants are more likely to find a mediator trusted by both parties and with an interest in preserving the relationships between them. In communities where social organization is dominated by "single interest"

relationships, i.e., friends are not neighbors and neighbors are not co-workers, shared relationships and therefore acceptable mediators do not exist in the requisite numbers to institutionalize alternatives to the police and the court. The more integrated the community the greater the number of trusted alternatives to the justice system.

In an effort to determine the relative importance of compositional as opposed to organizational explanations of community differences, we analyzed the effects of educational attainment, community tolerance, and community integration on the decision to use alternatives to the police. Tolerance was measured by the following six questions:

When a juvenile runs away from home -- should nothing be done? should the police warn the child? should he be put on court supervision? or should he be sent to a correctional facility?

When a juvenile uses cocaine, heroin or morphine:

1	2	3	4	5
nothing done	counselling	police warning	cohort supervision	sent to a correctional facility

When a juvenile steals something worth more than $50:

1	2	3	4	5
nothing done	counselling	police warning	cohort supervision	sent to a correctional facility

When a juvenile repeatedly refuses to obey his parents:

1	2	3	4	5
nothing done	counselling	police warning	cohort supervision	sent to a correctional facility

When a juvenile beats up or physically attacks another person:

1	2	3	4	5
nothing done	counselling	police warning	cohort supervision	sent to a correctional facility

When a juvenile takes a car or a motor vehicle without the owner's permission:

1	2	3	4	5
nothing done	counselling	police warning	cohort supervision	sent to a correctional facility

Respondents choosing to do nothing were most tolerant (1), those favoring police warning somewhat less tolerant (3) and so on to (5) those advocating incarceration who scored the least tolerant. The tolerance scores for for the six items were combined into a tolerance scale and dichotomized to simplify the analysis. Education was used as a measure of sophistication or knowledge of alternatives--the higher the education, the greater the ability to distinguish problems and to match problems with specialized solutions. Finally, community integration was measured by a two variable index combining neighboring and membership in community organizations. The Southwest community had the highest levels of neighboring and community organization membership and scored the highest on the community integration scale, followed by the South Central area and Southeast.

The three independent variables--education, community tolerance and community integration--were entered in a log-linear analysis with the dependent variable--use of alternatives to the police.

The logic of log-linear analysis requires a two step process in which acceptable combinations of hypothesized relationships among variables are identified and the most parsimonious combination or model is chosen from among the acceptable (Davis, 1972). Acceptable models are identified by comparing the hypothesized relationships to the

observed data. Statistically significant discrepancies between the hypothesized and observed distributions indicate that the model is inadequate to explain the data. In the second stage, various acceptable models are compared to determine which model provides the best fit with the fewest and least complex relationships among the variables, e.g., a model without interactions would be preferred to one with interactions.

TABLE 3:

Models and Likelihood Rated Chi-Squares for Tolerance(T), Education(E), Community Organization(C), and Alternatives Use(A)

Marginals	X^2	df	P
H1 ACE ATE ACT	10.7	8	> .75
H2 ACE AET	13.32	12	> .5
H3 ACE ACT	16.07	12	> .75
H4 ACT AET	61.33	16	< .001
H5 ACE	46.26	18	< .001
H6 ACE AT	18.17	16	> .5

Table 3 shows that the most parsimonious model for explaining the relationship between alternative use, tolerance, education and community organization includes the direct effects of education, community organization, and tolerance as well as the interaction of education and community organization. All of the independent variables influence the use of alternatives to the police and cannot be omitted from the model. In other words, the effects of community organizations on alternatives cannot be explained entirely by the composition of community areas and specifically the relative sophistication of community residents.

Moreover, the effect parameters shown in Table 4 -- measures of association compiled in the log-linear routine -- indicate that education has the greatest independent effect on alternatives use, followed closely by community organization. Community tolerance has the smallest independent effect upon the use of alternatives.

TABLE 4:

Effect Parameters for Model 11.6

Effect	Effect Parameter	Standard Value	P
Southeast	-.21	-3.4	.0007
Southwest	.21	3.06	.003
Grammar School Education	-.23	-3.28	.0001
College + Education	.31	4.82	.0001
Tolerance	.08	1.72	.089

Community organization, then, appears to have a substantial effect upon the decision to use alternatives to the police and, thereby, influences the extent to which children in specific communities will be labelled by formal agents of social control. The degree of community integration, however, exerts a much more substantial effect on the decision to use alternatives than the level of community tolerance. This suggests that the decision to use alternatives is not simply a matter of the individual educational attainment or the sophistication of community residents, but a matter of trust born of interaction at the community level. The more integrated a community — the more dense the patterns of interaction among residents and community organizations

-- the greater the number of potential trusted mediators who are perceived as viable alternatives to the police in responding to juvenile misbehavior. Efforts to prevent delinquency by preventing the labelling of youthful misbehavior should consider community as an important determinant in the process. More importantly, these findings indicate that efforts must focus on organizing the community such that persistent patterns of interaction are changed to encourage greater integration. This may entail the greater involvement of community based organizations in the delivery of certain services or encouraging the creation of problem specific voluntary associations at the community level and then attempting to weave these single purpose organizations into a more general and permanent network of people and organizations. The specific community organization strategy to be employed is beyond the scope of this presentation, but the important point is that there is some evidence that community organization can affect the labelling of juvenile misbehavior and the prevention of delinquency and more attention must be given to understanding the process by which this occurs.

Need for Future Research

The findings presented above simply suggest that community organization may have a role in delinquency prevention by buffering children from official labelling by the criminal justice systems. More must be done to confirm the importance of community organization for institutionalizing alternatives to the criminal justice system to specify the macro-social processes necessary to encourage and sustain the type of community organization which is conducive to buffering.

Confirming the Importance of Community

Additional comparative case studies like the one just reviewed would constitute a useful first step in confirming the importance of community in providing alternatives to the police and preventing labelling. However, studies of large numbers of community areas must be undertaken to define the range of community types both in terms of composition, i.e. age, race, sex, and class, and social organization, i.e. beliefs, interaction patterns and interorganizational relationships, before we can know if the communities studied above are aberrations or representative of the variation of community responses to juvenile misbehavior. More work, similar to that of Susan Frank, must be done to identify the range of community types and to relate community types to specific configurations of alternatives use. Since these studies will include several jurisdictions, they should also include organizational characteristics of the police as a contextual factor that can affect the development of alternatives. Highly professionalized police departments may engage in much more protective work with juveniles, thereby limiting the extent to which alternatives will limit labelling.

Subsequent case studies of alternatives use would contribute to our knowledge of community's role in creating alternatives by expanding the range of juvenile behavior examined and more precisely characterizing community organization with sociometric and network techniques. The analysis described above focused on status offense behavior, but communities respond differently to different types of behavior, and examining responses to more varied behavior including serious delinquency, minor delinquency, and status offense behavior would

provide a much more detailed picture of the use of institutionalized alternatives to the police.

Although questions referring to neighboring and organizational membership provide some idea of the integration in a community, they do not provide very detailed information on the interrelationship among individuals, groups and organizations in the community. High levels of neighboring do not necessarily mean that these relationships are dense and overlapping, and it may be the density and not simply the level of interaction that encourages the creation and maintenance of alternatives.

Further studies of community should also expand the analysis of the organizational life of the community to include less formal organizations, such as block clubs and athletic clubs. Identification of the relevant organization population should proceed from the survey of community residents as well as from the positional analysis used in our study. In this way, less formal but crucial organizations could be included in the organization interviewing and the characterization of community organizational life.

Specifying the Macro Social Requisites of Community Organization

Longitudinal studies should be undertaken to specify the relationship between macro social changes, community organization and the use of alternatives to the justice system. The work of Shaw and McKay (1942) masterfully integrated the macro social process of ethnic assimilation and urban land use patterns with community organization and the etiology of delinquent behavior. There is some question whether these models are out of date; whether ethnic assimilation is the same as racial relations; whether other institutional changes not entertained by

Shaw and McKay are more consequential for community organization and delinquency prevention. Racial transition in urban neighborhoods and the professionalism of the police and social service workers, for instance, may provide the context in which community organization influences the use of alternatives to the police. Mixed racial neighborhoods may exhibit the particular patterns of alternatives use not because they are mixed but because they are in transition and previously stable patterns of diversion are disrupted. Cross-sectional analysis cannot determine the influence of these dynamic processes.

Similarly, longitudinal studies can specify the causal relationship between professionalization of social control services and the destruction of less formal systems of social control. Do professionalizing organizations attempt to undermine less formal means of social control by usurping their function? Do they convince community organizations that they no longer need to perform the social control function and do they lessen the organizations' credibility among residents by refusing to defer to the community organization when it claims jurisdiction or responsibility? Conversely, do formal agents of social control simply fill the breach left by degenerating informal systems of social control? Once they fill the breach, can communities, when they have stabilized, reinstitute informal alternatives after formal agents of social control have claimed jurisdiction? Unless and until we have longitudinal analysis of communities and their role in providing alternatives to the police, we cannot answer these questions, nor can we begin to encourage the creation and expansion of informal systems of social control.

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